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Placing Romania in the European and International Market: The Role of Image in building a Nation Identity¹

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Abstract

Nowadays, image is radically important for any product, and even more so for a country. The image that a country displays to the world influences the attitude and perception of the other countries and people in general about itself. Romania is currently facing a brick wall in this area. Although the country is in a continuous change, the same cannot be said about the way others perceive it.

Throughout this paper, we would like to point out the importance and part of branding in the development and positioning of a country, by trying to answer questions such as what a country should and should not do in order to have a good and representative image towards the exterior.

Keywords: *image, identity, differentiation, country branding.*

For a country, having its own brand means having an identity, a name, a reputation. Nowadays, the brand is an intangible asset to any nation, which allows the growth of its value on the market. These days, in a globalized world, it is utterly important that countries differentiate, in order to enter the competition on the international market. It is far more important for a less known country or with a poor image to work hard on creating and promoting a strong and valuable brand, in comparison with the big, strong countries, that already attract investors and tourists and don't need a complex promotion campaign. Eventually, the countries are "products" that people, firms and even other countries use for export, tourism and investments.

Country branding is the image that a nation sets towards the exterior, its business card. The image a person has about a country is in fact the way that person sees that particular country as a touristic destination, as a place for investments or as a source of goods. Hence, "country branding becomes part of a self-perpetuating cycle: as a country promotes its brands, those brands will promote the country"².

Wally Olins, one of the most important branding consultants in the world, says that "what the rest of the world believes of a nation is important: it affects the ranking of that nation in the competition for tourism, investments, and exports and for political and cultural influence, things that reflect directly on the population's life standards".³ This perception depends on the image that the country creates for itself, image that needs to rely on reality and truth, needs to express the values and standards of that country and to present what the nation can give to the world.

¹ This paper was published in Luminița Șoproni, Ioan Horga (eds.), *Media and European Diversity/ Médias et Diversité Européenne*, Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2012, ISBN 2802730908; 9782802730903, p.239-254

² Luminița Nicolescu, Valentin Cojanu, Alina Popescu, Alina Drăghici, "Developing Country Branding: a Key Factor for International Competitiveness", in Paul Dobrescu, Andrei Țăranu, Alina Bârgăoanu, *Globalization and Policies of Development*, Editura Comunicare.ro, București, 2007, p.285

³ Wally Olins, *Noul ghid de identitate vizuală. Cum se creează și se susține schimbarea prin managementul identității*, Editura Comunicare.ro, București, 2004

Therefore, the main reasons why a country should create and promote a brand are the following: acknowledgement and differentiation on the world market, attraction of investments, promotion of exports and development of the tourism market.

Brands of different countries – a role model for Romania

Over the last few years, an increasing number of countries have spent substantial amounts in order to point out the national identity with the purpose of attracting tourists, foreign investors and to have a favorable image in the world. According to Wally Olins, the reason why countries permanently remodel their identity is this: the reality changes and nations need to project this real change, symbolically, in all categories of domestic and foreign audience that they relate with⁴.

Spain is the example of a country with a successful branding. A generation earlier, Spain was a poor, isolated, non-democratic country that made no difference in Europe. Nowadays, it is a respected European country. Reality has changed, and at the same time, the image of the country in Europe and in the world has changed as well. Of the economical potential of the new Spain speak multinational companies such as Repsol or Telefonica, of the tourism opportunities cities such as Madrid, Barcelona or Valencia, of its cultural strength, Miro, Gaudi and Almodovar's creations. With the help of the Olympics in Barcelona and the World Exhibit of Seville, Spain has spoken to the world of the drastic internal changes⁵. Spain's campaign took 18 years, but it was worthwhile. The country's rebranding was based not solely on the flamenco cliché, but also on Almodovar's movies, Miro and Dali's art, Calatrava's architecture, and it was all completed with the Government's initiatives that have brought the International Exhibit to Seville and the Olympic Games to Barcelona. This example expresses the fact that the image of a country needs to be built on historical values, athlete and researchers' efforts, literary, cinematographic and musical creation rather than the picturesque sadness of a fantastic character⁶. The sun in the painting of the surrealist artist Juan Miro and the slogan "*Everything under the Sun*" have become a symbol of the gigantic Spanish national program of modernization and have changed the country's image in the eyes of the Europeans. This program of activities has revitalized and re-enabled Spain both in the eyes of the Spanish and in those of the foreigners. Spain is one of the best examples of successful national branding, because it continues to build on what truly exists⁷.

Poland is a great example for what is long-term preservation of identity. Poland has had a problem – it is a former communist country. But as long as the Polish know who they are, what difference it makes what the rest of the world believes. Yet, given the fact that nations are in a permanent competition concerning tourism, investments, politics and exports, these things have an impact upon the population's lifestyle. This means that the most important is the fact that, if the reality of a nation changes, its image needs to change⁸. In 2002, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has hired the company DDB Corporate Profiles to design a logo that could be used to promote Poland's tourism and trade. The final outcome was a white-red dragon, whose tail is held by a character that dances and has the shape of the letter 'K', from the name of the country "Polska". The choice of the dragon as Poland's logo

⁴ Idem, „Branding the Nation – the historical context”, in *The Journal of Brand Management*, April 2002, Vol.9, p.3, <http://wallyolins.com/includes/branding.pdf>

⁵ Idem, „The image of Spain”, <http://wallyolins.com/includes/spain.pdf>, 16.02.09

⁶ Raluca Feher, „Ca să îți vinzi țara, cineva trebuie să o cumpere!”, in *România în lume*, Nr.2: Drumul spre centru – în căutarea identității naționale, p.27, <http://www.romaniainlume.ro/ro/publicatii/bi2/capitol2.pdf>, 16.02.09

⁷ Wally Olins, *Despre brand*, Editura Comunicare.ro, București, 2006, p.140

⁸ Idem, „Poland a national identity”, <http://wallyolins.com/includes/poland.pdf>, 18.02.09

was like finding “gold on the street”, says Szymon Gutkowski, the President of DDB Corporate Profiles in an article in *New York Times*. “A dragon represents youth, freedom, is playful and full of hope, in any country and any language”, he claims. Poland has chosen a dragon precisely to stand out. “Flags have political, military or national connotations. The dragon is post political, it represents a rupture of what is past; it’s modern”, explains Wally Olins in the same article in *New York Times*.⁹

Prior to making this logo, the brand consulting company has organized focus - groups in order to observe the way Poland was seen by strangers. The key words most often mentioned by the respondents were: cold, vodka, poverty, white, common, friendly, sad, boring, difficult living, car theft, anti-Semite, Auschwitz. The aim of this logo was to eliminate these preconceptions.¹⁰ The favorable image that they have developed in the West was that of expats. The Polish plumber, a widely-used expression in France in the spring of 2005 during the debates for the adoption of the European Constitution, became extremely popular, especially in the Hexagon. The Ministry of Tourism has accomplished a series of posters in order to promote the country; their central character was a plumber who expressed its desire to remain in Poland. The effect was notable: the percentage of French tourists who had come to Poland in 2005 increased by 14% compared to 2004.¹¹

Countries like *Holland* and *Canada*, through sustained efforts and perseverance, have built their own country brands. Although they have no motto that is known world-wide, those who are interested can find different sites on the Internet that are very specific both for investors and for tourists and institutional partnerships. Within each Dutch or Canadian Embassy, there are well-done flyers, specialized diplomats, technocrats who organize weekly business meetings or cultural, technological or touristic presentations. These are small organized meetings, but regular ones, with specialized speakers and updated information, which requires an intense research activity.¹²

Ireland has launched the brand “green with fame”. The image of this country is related to the color green and within the national branding have appeared a series of symbols that have become known all over the world: the leprechauns, the four-leave clover and luck. Interbrand claims that the brand has proven to be stronger than the country itself. The effects were as expected: these symbols have made the country more popular and at the same time, have changed the way Ireland was seen, setting it to cheerful registry.¹³

Slovenia has a “stable and calm” sense to itself. After gaining its independence in 1991, Slovenia was seen by the other Europeans as “the nation without known identity” and as being set on the “sunny side of the Alps”. Slovenia’s country brand, that is still ongoing, has changed these perceptions. The branding efforts were focused on the importance of diplomacy, of “peaceful and solid” things, but also on its status of regional leader. Today, Slovenia is seen as a stable country of the Balkans.¹⁴

⁹ Sarah Boxer, „The Way We Live Now: A New Poland, No Joke”, in *New York Times*, 01.12.02, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B03E4DA1E39F932A35751C1A9649C8B63>

¹⁰ Iulia Bunea, Andreea Lupu, „Brand de țară, cinste cui te are!”, in *Adevărul*, 02.04.08, <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/brand-de-tara-cinste-cui-te-are/340086>

¹¹ Alexandra Badicioiu, Cosmin Popan, „România, un brand plătit degeaba cu 8 milioane de euro”, in *Cotidianul*, 09.11.07, Website: *Cotidianul.ro*, http://www.cotidianul.ro/romania_un_brand_platit_degeaba_cu_8_milioane_de_euro-35377.html

¹² Andrei Stoiciu, „Branding de țară”, in *Averea*, 14.07.05, Website: *Iqads*, http://www.iqads.ro/revistapresei_998/branding_de_tara.html

¹³ Dollores Benezic, „Cum ne vindem țara”, in *Cotidianul*, 12.07.05, Website: *Bloombiz*, <http://www.bloombiz.ro/cariere/cum-ne-vindem-tara>

¹⁴ *Ibidem*

Why does Romania need a brand?

There are two clear reasons why Romania needs to create a valid brand: the country is included, by the rest of the world, in the undifferentiated mass of former communist and socialist countries and, at the same time, it is pointed out through the negative image created throughout Europe by the actions of its citizens or (most times abusively) induced by the foreign press (Romania of homeless children, thieves and gypsies).

Beggars, thieves and gypsies bother other Europeans who have come to consider these as symbols of Romania. On 29th May 2008, the Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* published a cartoon of how Romanians use the right of free travel. In the cartoon, there is a beggar in front of a bank and a police officer who says to her: "Travel". The cartoon is a reply to the protocol signed between EU and Switzerland concerning the extension of the free travel agreement of the European Union citizen to Bulgaria and Romania as well. As for the cartoon, the Romanians have taken measures – the Romanian Ambassador in Bern and the one at the United Nations sent the newspaper a reply, pointing out that the cartoon is offensive towards the Romanians who live and do honest work in Switzerland.¹⁵

Romanians are discriminated in Spain as well. On the web page of the company Fotocasa, there is the following real estate ad: "Offering a lease for an apartment in Yatova, with 3 rooms and a bathroom. Note: furnished, recently remodeled. No immigrants." Although the word "Romanian" doesn't explicitly appear in the ad, it is a well known fact that a large part of the immigrants of this country are of Romanian nationality. Again in Spain, in a town in Mallorca – Alcudia, the local police has impounded a billboard set out in front of an IT store that had an explicit xenophobic message. The Romanian flag was on the background and the message forbade the entrance of dogs and Romanians without the permission of the store. Both in the message and inside the store, those in charge of taxes have laid out a document named "Immigration" and the subtitle "The description of yesterday's cloddishness after three Romanians stole two laptops"; the message within the document had numerous slanging towards the Romanians. On top of all these, it is utterly awkward that in an area like Baleare, which relies on tourism, there are such great xenophobic actions.¹⁶

Romania's image in a clip that was part of a series presenting the 16 teams that participated at Euro 2008 was that of some "fat, dark people, with golden necklaces like those of convicts worn on naked chests". The clip, made by the British media company, Virgin Media, performs an honest analysis of the chances of Romanians to step outside a group considered to belong to the "dead ones", alongside of Italy, France and Holland. What shocks is the fact that, over the last 35 seconds of the video production, the background is a static image – meant to be "representative" – of the "fat, dark people" described earlier, photo that had probably been shot on the platform of a swimming pool. In the videos of the other 15 clips, each Euro 2008 participant has a truly representative image. Russia's National League presentation is illustrated by an image of the Red Market, Austria's – with a mountainous resort, Italy's – with the Coliseum in Rome, Germany's – with the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. Oh the other hand, our country's 'representative' image is that of gypsies. Virgin Media apologized to Romania's Embassy in London "for any kind of offense" in the presentation of Romania's team on which background appeared some men with large

¹⁵ „Imaginea României, făcută țandări în Europa”, 6.06.08, *Romanian Global News*, Website: [rgnpress.ro, http://www.rgnpress.ro/Social/Imaginea-Romaniei-facuta-tandari-in-Europa.html#Scene_1](http://www.rgnpress.ro/Social/Imaginea-Romaniei-facuta-tandari-in-Europa.html#Scene_1); HotNews.ro, 5.06.08, *ziarul-elvetian-temps-publicat-caricatura-ofensatoare-adresa-romanilor-ambasadorul-roman-elvetia-cel-onu-din-geneva-dat-drept-replica.htm*

¹⁶ „Guvernul spaniol pregătește o lege care să evite publicarea anunțurilor xenofobe”, 6.05.08, in *Romanian Global News*, <http://www.rgnpress.ro/Social/Guvernul-spaniol-pregateste-o-lege-care-sa-evite-publicarea-anunturilor-xenofobe.html>, „Una tienda de Mallorca prohíbe la entrada a "perros y rumanos", in *El Pais*, 13.05.08, Website: *ELPAIS.com*

abdomens and thick golden necklaces. The company ensured Romania that it has “taken immediate measures to withdraw the clip from YouTube” and promised to remake the sequence that has provoked dissatisfaction and would re-publish it.¹⁷ But the message sent remains and convinces us once again of the image that Romania currently has.

In France, the Romanians were called “chicken thieves”. Within the “100% Euro” Show aired on the French channel M6, the host Dominique Grimault repeatedly named the Romanians as “chicken thieves”, right after the game between France and Romania ended with the score 0-0. The host failed to apologize, but added that he was not the only one who referred to the Romanians painting them black, and therefore, why would he be the one to suffer the consequences on behalf of everybody else as well. The Romanian authorities have taken the incident very seriously. “Despite the fact that the French National Audiovisual Council has laid their fingers on the M6 television channel, the fact remains that some images from that show were aired by various news programs”, said Luca Nicolaescu, the chief editor of Radio France International – Romania. Romania’s Embassy in Paris was also responsive – the night the show was aired, they have sent a letter to the head of the M6 channel asking for sanctions towards Dominique Grimault and the hostess Estelle Denis, who should have cut in.¹⁸

Romania’s image was greatly damaged in Italy as well. The recent aggressions with the involvement of Romanian citizens, despite their Rom ethnicity, emphasize the Italians’ negative perception that extrapolates towards the entire Romanian community in Italy. The Italian press speaks of the rapes perpetrated by Romanians as a phenomena, a real threat to the Italian’s safety, thus creating confusions that affects both the image and the safety of the Romanian community in Italy, as well as the image of Romania as a whole. Merely some of the most recent news from the Italian newspaper is more than outrageous due to the violence on behalf of some Romanian citizens, but also due to the way they are seen and treated by the Italians, as a result to the anti-immigration campaign held in this country: Romanian credit card forgers arrested in Rome (*Corriere della Sera*, 11.02.2009: “Arrestata a Roma una banda di 5 rumeni che clonava carte di credito”), the rapists in Rome are Romanians (*Corriere della Sera*, 17.02.2009: “Stupro Caffarella, fermati due romeni. «Perché l'ho fatto? Per dispetto»”; *La Stampa*, 18.02.2009: „Presi gli stupratori della Caffarella "L'abbiamo fatto solo per dispetto””), drunken Romanian charged with attempt at rape (*La Repubblica*, 17.02.2009: “Romeno ubriaco entra in una casa e tenta di violentare una anziana”), Romanian person murdered by a drugged and drunk Italian (*Corriere della Sera*, 23.02.2009: “Italiano drogato e ubriaco al volante travolge e uccide operaio romeno”). Recent events have led to the necessity of the meeting between Romania’s Minister of Foreign Affairs with the Italian one, on 23rd February 2009, in order to readjust the crime issue and to sustain the Romanian citizens’ right of free travel to and within Italy. The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cristian Diaconescu, has agreed to the necessity of zero tolerance, sustained by the Italian government through the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini and has promised that Romania will cooperate entirely with the Italians. Yet, he outlined the fact that Bucharest will not drop its commitment to allow free travel to its citizens.

¹⁷ Bogdan Munteanu, „Simbolul României la Euro 2008 – niște burtoși tuciurii, cu lanțuri groase de aur – VIDEO”, in *Gândul*, 6 June 2008, <http://www.gandul.info/sportul/imaginea-romaniei-la-euro-barbati-cu-burta-si-lanturi-mari-de-aur-video.html?3941;2688666>; „Virgin Media a prezentat scuze ambasadei României la Londra”, 5 June 2008, Website: *mediafax.ro*, <http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/virgin-media-a-prezentat-scuze-ambasadei-romaniei-la-londra.html?1687;2688951>

¹⁸ Jean-François Pérès, „Quand un journaliste de M6 dérape et traite les Roumains de «voleurs de poules»”, 11.06.08, Website: *RFI*, http://www.rfi.fr/sportfr/articles/102/article_67380.asp; Pierre Courade, „M6 mise en demeure par le CSA pour "propos injurieux””, 10.06.08, Website: <http://www.ozap.com/actu/m6-demeure-csa-injures/143492>

Romania is one of the few states that have not yet defined a country brand that is recognized throughout the world by the foreigners. The country is known world-wide as the “country of Dracula and Ceausescu” and most recently, the country where criminals come from (in Italy for the most part, but not only). Apart from these “brands”, some foreigners also know Gheorghe Hagi, Nadia Comaneci, Adrian Mutu or Dacia Logan. Therefore, Romania has no clear image, a brand, like the Eiffel Tower is for France or the Statue of Liberty for the United States of America.

What has been done up until this point?

There have been numerous attempts, more or less successful, to create a country brand for Romania. Although it can be said that we are interested in creating a country image, this attempts have not gone by without controversy. Creating a country’s brand and image is a communication issue that includes discovering and transmitting some values and symbols that belong solely to the Romanian people, which individualizes it and makes it known world-wide. Hence, branding communication is not only a problem to the authorities, to the political class, but also to each Romanian that represents its country before others.

There is a series of circles where country branding is eagerly spoken of; there are blogs, conferences, press articles and much frustration. The more one is emotionally or professionally involved in an area, the bigger the frustration is. However, the saddest fact is that there is no feedback of the efficiency level of any attempt made so far.¹⁹

The first failed attempt was the magazine “*Eternal and Fascinating Romania*”, from back in the ‘90s, which cost 7 million dollars and stirred a lot of political and financial controversy.²⁰

Another failed attempt was the program “*Made in Romania*” launched in 2000. Its role was to support inland producers in the disloyal competition against the imported goods.²¹ The “Made in Romania” program was meant to convince the Romanians to purchase the Romanian goods. Through this program, business people have tried to level the commercial balance that had been increasingly tending to incline towards imports. Moreover, the expansion of the outlet for the strong inland producers that were competing with the foreign enterprisers was desired. The program didn’t even make it past its initial stage, being rapidly choked by the misunderstandings between members. The program launched by the Association for Promotion of Products and Services – Romania implied applying a tax of 100 million old Lei at the most to each member entering this program. Initially, this did happen, but the producers noticed that the “Made in Romania” label fails to increase sales and due to their refusal to continue to pay the tax, the program went bankrupt. Cristina Preda, the President of Brand Academy believes that “Made in Romania” has failed because “the producers weren’t truly involved in the project, and the consumers failed to perceive it as an initiative that holds their needs into account, but by a mere campaign initiated by a third party, the government, due to a motive related strictly to image”.²²

The campaign initiated by the Tourism Ministry “*Romania, always surprising*”, organized by Ogilvy&Mather in 2004, cost 1.7 million dollars, but followed the same

¹⁹ Ioana Manea, „Scrisoare deschisă despre România”, în *Brand4Brand*, nr. 21, December 2007- January 2008, p.54

²⁰ „Brand de țară, cinste cui te are...”

²¹ „Programul Fabricat în România – premise”, Website: [fabricatinromania.ro](http://www.fabricatinromania.ro), <http://www.fabricatinromania.ro/prezentare/index.html>, 07.06.08

²² Cristian Niculescu, „Fabricat și demontat în România”, in *Banii noștri*, 16.05.05, Website: *Branding România.ro*, <http://www.brandingromania.com/?p=34>

pathway to failure. The representatives of the World Tourism Organization criticized the slogan, reasoning that the message doesn't capture the essence of Romania for its potential visitors. The motto "Romania, always surprising" has the national colors and the letter "m" in Romania is styled as a mountain, and there is a sun and a sea on the background. This image was criticized by some as being far too vague and incapable to clearly differentiate us from others.²³ Richard Bantchelor, the chief of the international consultants' team, representative of the World Organization of Tourism stated that "on the whole, Romania has no clear or strong image on the market".²⁴

Another campaign launched to promote the image of Romania was the one initiated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2006: *Fabulospirit*. The slogan "Romania – Fabulospirit" outlines the Romanians' spirit – people around whom you cannot be bored, associated with the words "fabulous" and "spiritual". It was desired to point out that, if the English are conservatory, Italians are chatty, and Germans are technical, Romanians are spiritual.²⁵ The campaign was directed against the negative perceptions about Romania in countries within the European Union, and it was planned according to the evaluation of Romania's image in some European countries. The Minister of Foreign Affairs proposed that 2-3 million Euros would be spent for the implementing of the "Fabulospirit", but nothing came out of it except the charge of 110.000 Euros for the company who came up with the concept.²⁶ There have been several opinions about the "Fabulospirit" campaign coming from people in the advertising branch, the general idea being an interesting concept, but too idealistic, with no specific, genuine symbols and therefore, difficult to sell. And they were right, because the authors of the concept didn't even manage to sell the motto to the Romanians, as in to make themselves understood – to explain to the Romanians what it means and nonetheless, to promote it abroad.

Another promoting campaign for Romania was launched by the Ministry of European Integration, with the slogan "*A fresh look at Romania*". Even though in order to accomplish an efficient communication, the essential condition is that the message is submitted to a well defined objective and an uniform character, the Ministry of Integration positions Romania differently than all the previous campaigns, as a member of the European Union, a dynamic country with a business environment that offers a lot of investment opportunities.²⁷ Advertising articles were printed and inserted in *The Economist* and *Financial Times*, for a fair charge, with the declared purpose of informing the readers of the advantages offered by Romania. The problem was that the prints looked bad: they had too much text, difficult to read, no pictures, they were meant to imitate a magazine's page, but they failed to even come close as a style and didn't attract the readers' attention.²⁸

RomaniaIT was a regional program, created to promote the IT&C area, based on the quality of the Romanian services. But the technical design of the logo is not so amiable: the character used is plain; color inspires nothing, and the symbol chosen, Brancusi's Infinite

²³ Cristina Coteanu, „Cum ne vindem țara”, in *Averea*, 11.11.06, <http://www.presa-zilei.ro/stire/462/vindem-tara.html>

²⁴ „Expertilor OTM nu le este pe plac sloganul „România mereu surprinzătoare”, in *Gardianul*, 10.07.07, http://www.gardianul.ro/2007/07/10/economie-c1/expertilor_omt_nu_le_este_pe_plac_sloganul_romania_mereu_suprinzatoare_-s97692.html

²⁵ Cristian, Covaci, „România – Fabulospirit” va vinde imaginea României în UE”, 22.02.07, Website: *HotNews.ro*, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1112791-romania-fabulospirit-vinde-imaginea-romaniei.htm>

²⁶ Alexandra Bădicioiu, Cosmin Popan, „Romania: un brand platit degeaba cu 8 milioane de euro”, în *Cotidianul*, 8.11.07, Website: *Cotidianul.ro*, http://www.cotidianul.ro/romania_un_brand_platit_degeaba_cu_8_milioane_de_euro-35377.html

²⁷ „O nouă campanie de comunicare de tip Made in Romania”, 6.03.07, Website: *Brand Identity.wordpress.com*, <http://brandidentity.wordpress.com/2007/03/06/o-noua-campanie-de-comunicare-tip-made-in-romania/>

²⁸ „Pierdut brand de țară, îl declar nul”, 10.04.07, Website: *Brand Identity.wordpress.com*, <http://brandidentity.wordpress.com/2007/04/10/pierdut-brand-de-tara-il-declar-nul/>

Column, besides the uninspired stylization, is a mere national symbol, with nearly no relevance abroad. In comparison, successful logos used abroad are based on universally renowned symbols like the heart (New York, Hungary or Bosnia) or the smile (London).²⁹

Along the same lines was the campaign *Sibiu – the European Cultural Capital*. The program was considered to be our country's first real image campaign and, at the same time, the most complex cultural program organized in Romania. The attached funds were used for rehabilitation works, acquisition of equipments, the rehabilitation of several churches, organization of cultural projects, promotion of the program, rehabilitation of the airport of Sibiu.³⁰ In the case of this campaign, the problem was another – the selling technique. Instead of an attempt to sell the benefits directly to the target public, which is history, safety, the city's events or its beauty, an abstract concept was used: Sibiu, European cultural capital. This should have been just the opportunity of the promotion campaign and not its theme.³¹

The project "*Imagine Romania*", initiated in 2005 by several non-government youth organizations united under the name of "The Group of Initiative for Promotion of Romania's Image" implied the organization of seminars and workshops with the purpose of debating about Romania's image and ending with the initiation of projects for the promotion of the country's image. The objectives were the desire to sensibly the opinion makers about the necessity of Romania's image promoting strategy and consequently, its implementation, by direct involvement on behalf of the mass media, civil society and political and cultural figures.³² This project was initiated in the context of Romania's integration in the European Union, in order to outline its identity and to promote the country's symbols. Therefore, it is utterly important that the identity elements are most accurately found and that these send the world a positive message about our country and the Romanian spirit.³³

Why have the country branding attempts failed? What is to be done?

In the '90s, in order to build the brand Romania, it all started from a negative image of homeless children and mining demonstrations. The mistake was the advertising done to Romania abroad, entirely different from the reality inside the country. To a message like "in Romania everybody will steal from you, starting with the customs and ending with the seaside", you cannot reply with "the eternal and fascinating" picture album or an advertising spot that speaks of a "dreamland" carrying the characters on the wind's wings.³⁴

The promotion campaigns done so far were wrong because they have tried to promote and sell the country as a product with no life, no dynamics, and no people. In reality, people are those who create publicity, not products. But at the same time, people carry part of the guilt, because Romania will continue to be seen abroad as a corrupt and bureaucrat country of gypsies, thieves and criminals, with no civilization and perspective because people do nothing to change this perception.

The people of a country are the most viable exhibits of image in the international press, the most visible ambassadors. But Romanians have done nothing other than eager speeches of the necessity of the existence of a definitive brand for Romania. There is no

²⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁰ „Sibiu-Capitală Culturală Europeană: bilanț”, 4.12.07, Website: *Fabrica de bani.ro*, <http://www.fabricadebani.ro/news/5228/0/sibiu-capitala-culturala-europeana--bilant.htm>

³¹ „Pierdut brand de țară...

³² „Proiectul Imagine România”, 13.09.05, Website: *Branding Romania*, <http://www.brandingromania.com/?p=58>

³³ Tudor Bercea, „Grupul de Inițiativă pentru Promovarea Imaginii României”, Website: *Informis.ro*, <http://www.informis.ro/articole.php?aID=57>

³⁴ Adela Rogojinaru, *Relații publice și publicitate: tendințe și provocări*, Editura Tritonic, București, 2006, p.144

coherent plan of action on the side of the government to analyze the causes of the failed attempts to create a country brand up to now, to draw the necessary conclusions and to form an integrant strategy in this area. There are several elements that could be the fresh start. We have products that are renown on the international market (wines, bio goods, mineral water), we have famous figures (Brancusi, Cioran, Nadia Comaneci, Ilie Nastase, Gheorghe Hagi), regions (the Danube Delta, Moldavia and its monasteries, the Bucegi Mountains with the Sphinx and Old Ladies).

A national brand is, as Wally Olins says, a “good piece” of the country brand. He also says that a brand like Logan, which is widely known in Europe, is an ace to Romania that needs to be used, because few Eastern European countries have brands with such an outstanding performance.³⁵ Alongside of such products, areas like culture and sports need to be involved as well (areas where we also have strong points, like the George Enescu Festival, the Golden Deer Festival, and the gymnastics team) in a consistent long term strategy.

In order to create a brand, we must first “sell” it on the inside. It is important that above all, the Romanians respect themselves and have a good opinion about their own country. If we don’t respect our values, the foreigners definitely won’t either. Moreover, for the brand to be successful, it has to present reality, because that is the only way to build a country’s reputation.

A good solution for the accomplishment of this objective would be using a specialist in this field, a man with experience in creating country brands. Nowadays, there are merely a few people of this kind, and Wally Olins is one of them, who contributed to the formation of the brand identities of many countries, like Spain or Poland.

Regardless if we do something or not, things happen, the public’s image is formed concerning Romania and its people. If these things happen coherently and the positive aspects are outlined through a program thought of within a national strategy, everything will work better and more quickly.

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